

September 2015

No. 39

Northeast Buckwheat Growers Newsletter

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Buckwheat delivery streamlined

At Birkett Mills, receiving-house supervisor Tim Pinneo has developed procedures that reduce waiting time. First, growers who intend to deliver can call 315-536-4112 to reserve a delivery time. While the time won't be down to the minute, drivers with reservations can avoid being in an unexpected long line of trucks.

Tim wants to remind everyone of the new purity standards for gluten-free product. Buyers of buckwheat have very low tolerance for gluten-containing grains (oats, barley and wheat) as well as soybeans. Make sure that the combine, wagons, and trucks are thoroughly cleaned so that these seeds don't show up in the load.

People with celiac seek out buckwheat because it is one of the few grain-like foods they can eat. Therefore, Birkett Mills is going to great lengths to assure that the buckwheat is truly gluten-free. Inspecting the grain that arrives in the truck is an essential step. If such screens need to be cleaned at the mill, it can take a lot of time to do the cleaning and the certification that all the non-buckwheat material is gone.

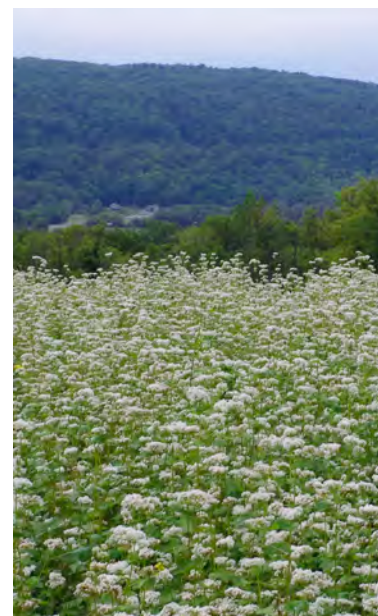
All Birkett Mills buckwheat receiving is now done at the Hamilton Street facility, not at the old mill off of Main St. by Keuka Outlet. That separation from wheat keeps the buckwheat pure.

2015 Buckwheat Field Day

The 2015 Northeast Buckwheat Field Day was at the Don Hatfield farm, near Moravia, NY on August 26.

Don Hatfield has been producing grain near Owasco Lake for many years, and is Certified Organic. This is the second year of buckwheat production. Buckwheat is intended to help his cash crop rotation, particularly for weed management. Buckwheat is sown when perennial weeds would otherwise be growing, and it can smother summer-annual weeds.

The field day highlighted the dilemma buckwheat growers faced at planting time. Because June was unusually wet, the ground was not



ready to plant at the usual date, and there was no assurance that things would get better. While waiting for the rain to stop, several soybean growers became buckwheat growers, but with much of their patience already used up. Don Hatfield was motivated to get planted sooner in part so that there would be something to see at this field day, and his efforts are appreciated.

To make sure they had a crop at all, some buckwheat was sown as soon as it was possible to get in the field. Growers held off planting some fields for a couple of weeks. Because the rain stopped in early

July, that waiting paid off. The growers at the field day reported relatively poor growth in buckwheat fields planted in early July but strong growth in those planted in mid July.

The later plantings will have slightly lower maximum yield potential, but the early plantings were not going to reach that kind of potential. The trade-off was well worth it. The later plantings are at higher risk of an early frost before the green is mature, but that risk may be at higher elevations and northerly parts of the Northeast buckwheat-growing region.



Participants at the 2015 buckwheat field day made a lot of good connections. Photo by Robert Perry, NOFA-NY.



The plants revealed that seeding depth affected plant size considerably, whether too deep or too shallow. The plants were smaller. Photo by Robert Perry, NOFA-NY.

Research note: Seedborne pathogens

Eva Kovačec and colleagues at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia looked into the fungi present in buckwheat seeds. We have long been aware that there are a lot of microorganisms living inside buckwheat seeds. This group found that harvest, about a third of the seeds contained a fungus. The most common type were two common pathogens *Botrytis* and *Alternaria*. The good news is that aging the seed until planting time the following year caused load to drop to near zero.

This drop in pathogen load would result in improved seed-germination tests between harvest and planting time. If poor germination is caused by botrytis (the gray fuzz is a good hint), then it may be worth reevaluating the seed lot several months later.

Kovačec, Eva, Mateuž Likar, Ivan Kreft, Marjana Regvar. 2014. Interactions of endophytic fungi from seeds of common buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum* Moench). Conference: 6th Slovenian Symposium on Plant Biology

2015 Field Day (cont.)

The group was discussed planting equipment, which is critical to getting a good start. We were in a field that demonstrated the importance of a uniform seeding depth. While the field had been drilled, the soil condition made it hard for the implements to work evenly. Growers who broadcast face a greater challenge getting uniform seeding depth. Seed placement can be seen by comparing the location of the soil surface, where the stem changes from white or pink to green, with the seed location, which is where the stem turns to root.

One of Don Hatfield's challenges in his field crop rotation is persistent weeds, and his hope for buckwheat is to manage that problem. At the field day, we saw areas where buckwheat was suppressing weeds and others where it was not. The difference was largely variation in how well the seedlings started. Buckwheat seedlings are well known not to like wet feet, and the fine roots of buckwheat are not good at spreading through the hard soil that results if it has been worked wet.

The slower initial buckwheat growth allowed weed seedlings to germinate. During the vegetative growth of buckwheat, the first month or so, those weed seedlings were held in check. However, once the buckwheat set seed, and the leaves began wilting in the afternoon, the weeds were able to start growing again. This is a situation that can easily surprise the buckwheat grower, because it seems as if large weeds come out of nowhere ready to drop seeds. In fact, they were lurking under the buckwheat all along. A fast start for the buckwheat is the critical step for smothering weeds.

Resilience to wet conditions paid off this year. That resilience is part of soil health, particularly soil aggregation and water percolation. Buckwheat contributes to that aggregation. In general, soil health is encouraged by having live or decomposing roots for as much of the year as possible, and by being parsimonious with tillage intensity.



Wet ground at planting can result in a meadow of weeds with a few patches of buckwheat flowers.

Harvest timing

September has been uncommonly warm, especially the nights. That weather has slowed leaf loss, leaving fields greener than usual at harvest time. Checking the grain for maturity is important. It is easy to become distracted by the foliage, when it has no bearing on when to cut the crop.

The first grain to mature is usually a foot or so from the top of the plant. Determine the harvest date by monitoring those clusters, so that the grain is not so mature that it falls on the ground.

Pulling the grain off by hand is an easy way to monitor how easily it will combine. The pedicels tend to be stronger in the morning, weaken during the day as they dry, then get a little stronger by morning.



This pattern means that checking in late afternoon gives the longest lead time for planning the cut.

Buckwheat ready to harvest. The filled grain is completely mature. The green leaves and open flowers are a common distraction that can cause novice buckwheat growers to wait too long to being harvest.

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Buckwheat Festival



*In Preston
County, WV,
King Buckwheat,
Mathew Biggens,
was crowned on
Sept. 25, 2015*

Photo Theresa Marthey

Festival pancake-makers went through about 2½ tons of buckwheat flour over the course of the weekend. Longtime NBGA member Tom McConnell was there, grinding local buckwheat for the occasion.

About the Northeast Buckwheat Growers Association

The NBGA is made up of about 180 buckwheat growers in the Northeast.

Membership may be obtained by contacting the editor and providing contact information (address, phone, email). There is currently no charge to join.

This semi-annual newsletter goes out to those who have signed up as members of NBGA. The printed version is sent to

members in the Northeast, and electronic version elsewhere. The complete member list is distributed to members each fall.

The Northeast Buckwheat Growers Association has been on the World Wide Web since 1998. An on-line Buckwheat Production Guide for the Northeast and back issues of this newsletter are available there.



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